

**Uncivilisation**



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## **Preface**

This booklet presents a different way of viewing and thinking about the world. A view that in the author's opinion is desperately needed if we are to envision a future free of hierarchy, inequality and ecological destruction.

Whether you consider this booklet to be about anarchy, deep ecology, anarcho-primitivism, green anarchy, or some other such label, is for you to decide. I have used the title Uncivilisation to avoid any pre-existing labels, though ideas from all movements have contributed to it, and none of the ideas presented within are original. The word uncivilisation was borrowed from the Dark Mountain Project, and seemed a fitting title for this booklet (<http://uncivilisation.co.uk/> or <http://www.dark-mountain.net/>).

The term civilisation is explained in more detail at the end of chapter 6. It is used here, loosely, to mean that system of human society which has dominated for the last 10,000 years or so. It is not used to represent any form of mass society that may or may not be possible in the future. Indeed, the hope must be that we can collectively find a form of mass society which completely rejects the mantra of civilisation, since the alternative course is one of continued slavery or extinction.

## **Introduction**

*From every camp, voices counsel that there can be no turning back from the path of progress, the unfolding of still more hi-tech consumerist desolation. How hollow they sound, as we consider what has been lost and what may yet, one desperately hopes, be recovered.*

*John Zerzan*

Many cultures have a creation myth that speaks of a mythical Garden of Eden. In this Garden we were naked and held no shame. We were equals, and treated each other with love. We did not have to work for our food – it was bountiful. The Earth provided for all our needs. Then we did something wrong, and we were expelled from the Garden. We became ashamed of our nakedness. We had to work hard for our food. We acquired the knowledge of the gods, and assumed mastery over creation. We became violent, treacherous and devious, and all the animals feared us. In other words, we became civilised.

This is a shared story. It is your tale, your birthright. What has been stolen from you can be taken back. All that keeps you trapped is you. Listen, feel, open your mind and your heart. Allow your mind to wander, far, far from civilisation. Far from it. And when you are there, listen to the true story of life. For only there will you hear it.

## **Civilisation**

*We are being lied to everyday, every minute of our lives. A war has been raging for the last 10,000 years, a war that is now reaching its endgame, a war that few people would even recognise. A war that has captured and imprisoned more and more people as time has gone on, until now it effectively*

*spans the globe, and everyone has forgotten that they are prisoners. But prisoners we are.*

*Ishmael*

Civilisation is a prison. How does civilisation imprison us? It is simple to see the bars of your cage, and to recognise the prison guards, for they are all around you, everyone you meet. If we fail to obey, if we fail to make our contribution to the destruction of the world, if we fail to work, to produce material wealth for our overlords, then we are punished. We will no longer have access to food. We will no longer have access to shelter. We will no longer have access to land. We will be denied any living space. We will be hounded and shunned everywhere we go. We will be outcasts, derided as lazy and slobbish, never allowed to exercise our fundamental right as an animal: the right to freedom. The right to live. In this way we are forced to continue to take our place within civilisation, forced to create wealth and resources for the rich and powerful, and forced to contribute to the destruction of the earth and the elimination of all life.

Who would work in a job they didn't like if they were not forced to? Who would chose to live in a squalid slum if they were not forced to? Civilisation is a brutish, destructive, violent system of abuse and domination. Like a big bully, it forces us into compliance against our will, and makes us think that this is all there is. There is no other way. Before civilisation there was only suffering. Life was a constant struggle to survive, living in constant fear of predation and in constant hunger. Civilisation comforts us, tells us that it is ok, it will take care of us, come along, embrace me...

Yet there is a story that is not told. A story that civilisation does not want you to hear. There is another way, there always has been another way, and there always will be another way.

It is my hope this booklet will help you to understand the real problem, and to envision a new future. This is not about returning to a distant past. This

booklet is an attempt to explain a way of life, a method of living, a philosophy - it is not about the technology. It is about our relation with all life on earth. Fundamentally, it is about ending the destructive practice known as civilisation. Most people shudder at the thought – that is because they know no alternative. Surely, to end civilisation is to return to a primitive, lowly existence, an awful, horrible life. If this is your response, then you need to question where that voice comes from, who told you it, why do you believe it? For this is the voice of your mother culture – civilisation – these are the bars of your prison. If you fail to recognise them, you will always be a prisoner.

It is my aim in writing this to get you to see those bars and to help you to break out. You may not wish to leave, but it is my duty to you, to show them to you, and try to start you on the long journey home.

Please, read on, but be wary of the voice of civilisation, be very wary. Listen for it, seek it out, recognise it, and eliminate it. Destroy it. Open your mind to a new possibility. A new way, a way that has been with us since time immemorial, a way we must return to if we are to save each other and the current phase of life on Earth.

We must all recognise, in the words of Ishmael, that we are all enacting a story. If we are to change, we need to change the story. Before we change the story, we need to know the story. The purpose of this booklet is to tell you the story. To bring you to an understanding of it. To allow you to see the lie, and to begin to envision the future.

### **Deep Ecology**

*We must hope that we all find out we're being lied to, as that would make a very great difference indeed.*

*Ishmael*

The deep ecology view is that humanity is a creature of nature that must adapt to the limits of nature of which it is but a part, the whole of which is

greater than the sum of its parts, and each part of which are afforded equal status. The civilised view is that mankind will surpass all limits and remake creation to suit its own needs and wants, which are considered above the needs and wants of every living thing. Civilisation is inherent destruction posing as progress. Deep ecology is nature as civilisation.

### **The Problem with Civilisation**

*Even if you don't believe the lie you are captive as everyone around you believes it and holds you captive. You are forced to consent. People are captivated by this story – they give their lives to defend it and to make it a reality, despite the fact that it's only in the interests of a powerful few.*

*Ishmael*

Let us begin with the obvious, and move on from there. You are a slave. A prisoner. You are held captive by civilisation. You are forced to work in order to eat, you are forced to work in order to sleep, and you are forced to work in order to create wealth and resources for your civilised overlords. This is not a natural state of affairs. This has been engineered. You are in prison, like a wild animal in a zoo, or to be more accurate, like an animal born in a zoo and never having experienced the wild, or freedom. Some may find it a comfortable prison, just like some zoos, but a prison it is.

Many animals that are born into zoos would, if given the choice, be too scared to leave it, or would die if they did. For most civilised people it is the same. This is understandable. We know no other way.

If you overcome a lifetime of conditioning and come to comprehend your prison, you may try to escape, but you will soon find there is no escape. Many people try every day, but the net result is the same. You will not get fed, and will be denied the opportunity to feed yourself. You will not be allowed a place to sleep. You will be hounded and derided to the end of your days, and shunned by your people.



But the moment you come back, the moment you embrace work, you are rewarded. You are once more a productive member of civilisation. Now you are fed again, now you are clothed, now you have a place to sleep, and for this you are supposed to be grateful.

If you truly embrace the principles of civilisation, and begin to dominate and exploit all life around you, then you are rewarded even more. In fact, if you really excel at this you will find that soon you are celebrated, held up as an example of greatness, and people everywhere will look up to you and wish they were like you. You will have reached the pinnacle of civilisation, and become the very enemy of life itself.

Most prisoners of civilisation, when asked, would state that they are fundamentally opposed to the idea of ecological destruction, of violence or of inequality. In fact, amongst civilised peoples such notions are largely frowned upon, and considered unethical. Yet few seem to question the glaring contradiction that stares us straight in the face: try as we might, every action we take within civilisation results in ecological destruction, violence and inequality. Even the most virtuous among us, despite their best efforts, and years of effort, are unable to actually stop themselves doing so. For whatever it is we do within civilisation, no matter what it is, is the product of a chain of actions that relies on violence, inequality and ecological destruction.

How is it then, that we civilised people do not recognise that these qualities, which we ourselves frown upon, are in fact the very basis of civilisation, the same civilisation of which we are so proud, the same civilisation which we call progress, the same civilisation which we cling to, even as it brings us and every living thing closer and closer to complete destruction?

We know we are unsustainable. Yet we do nothing about it. We know we are heading for complete collapse and destruction. Yet we do nothing about it. Why? What is it that stops us? Why do we continue to prop up civilisation despite the fact that we know it's doomed to destroy us all? What powerful force is it exerting on us to hold us so strongly? What are we being sold on?

## What are we being sold on?

*The concept of progress has been in trouble for decades, but the general crisis is deepening now at a quickening pace. From this palpable extremity it is clear that something is profoundly wrong. How far back did this virus originate? How much must change for us to turn away from the cultural death march we are on?*

John Zerzan

Most people will tell you that they have no choice – *there is no alternative*. What choice do we have but to continue? *It is the only option*. Either that or we *live like animals*, and that is unthinkable. *We can't live like animals*. If we *lived like animals*, then surely we'd end up *behaving like animals*? Next thing you know, we'd just be a bunch of *primitive savages*.

*This is the voice of civilisation*. Hear it! This is but one of the creeping, invasive, insidious messages that are force fed into our minds from the day we are born, and continues being force fed at every waking moment of every waking day we exist as civilised peoples. These are the bars that hold us. This is our collective cage. Even if you recognise it, you cannot escape, for others around you do not recognise it and will force you into line. Recognise it, and strive to undo the damage that has been done to you, and to others. For you have been born into captivity, and only you can free yourself.

The world in its entirety is held prisoner by civilisation, and may not much longer survive. Some wish to save what's left, to free it, recognising that little will remain when civilisation has run its course. Civilisation is nothing but a *viral idea*. An idea that entered our common unconscious 10,000 years ago. An idea that has since spawned war and destruction on an unimaginable scale. An idea that requires our cooperation to fulfil its ends. Understand what that idea is. Understand exactly what it says. And then ask yourself one question: what are you going to do about it? If you still choose to embrace

civilisation, then you have sold out on life itself. If you choose the alternative, then you have chosen to embrace life itself.

## **The Voice (mantra) of Civilisation**

Before we can envision the future we must learn to recognise the voice of civilisation. Unless we recognise the voice we will never accept the true story, and will continue to replace one system of domination for another, or simply tweak at the controls.

Our choice is simple, either we work for our masters, become a cog in the destructive machinery of civilisation, or we will be marginalised, socially estranged and pushed to the edge. This is the true face of civilisation. This is 10,000 years of *progress*. If we refuse to believe in the story there is no exit. There are no edges to the system that we can pass across. Not anymore. Civilisation spans the globe. Soon it will conquer all, and when it does all life will perish.

We are taught that this is how it should be. We are indoctrinated at school and through the media, and this is reinforced every day of our lives through our friends and family, through everything we read and see. There is a lie out there, and everybody is telling everybody else it. Nobody remembers who started it, nobody even remembers that it is a lie. It pervades everything. We hear it every day, yet we don't hear it, because it is so implicit in everything we do and say that we don't even know it is there. You need to hear this lie, you need to see it, recognise it, and tell others, because we haven't got much time.

Such a lie is required to maintain control. If we fail to maintain control, the slaves do not get fed, and civilisation begins to crumble. I do not wish to be a slave, to be controlled, to be hand fed. I desire freedom. Yet if you choose to take this journey you will find no comfort. You will be alienated from those around you.

*We are not animals. They are lower than us. We are more advanced. We do not live like animals. We have evolved beyond any animal. We can control*

*the world, manipulate it for our ends. The world is ours for the taking, it is there for our use. Our interests outweigh those of all life on earth, for only we are intelligent. That makes us very special indeed. That makes us the pinnacle of evolution. If we lived like animals we would be nothing. Before history there was only pre-history. An empty span of time during which we lived in ignorance, like animals. We were primitive, and savage. We lived a half starved existence on the edge, constantly in fear of predation. Life was meaningless. History began with civilisation. Only then did we become the modern, advanced, civilised human beings we are today. We are marvellous, and because we are so smart we must control the world for its own good. We cannot allow wildness. The wild is a dangerous place. The wild is out there, somewhere else, we must always keep it at a distance, never allow it to come too near. People should be grateful we are civilising them. They might not like it now but eventually they will appreciate it. Right now they are primitive savages – how can they understand the benefits we are bestowing on them. No, we must take their land and civilise them, it is in their own good. They are too simple to understand what we are giving them. How can they live like that? It's awful. We must help them to advance. Nothing must stand in the way of progress. Animals are subservient to our needs. Their land and resources are ours. They have no right over our property. They must make way for us, as we must make way for those above us. Our masters are essential to maintain control and order and to protect us. Without them there would be chaos. Life would be a mess, each neighbour would wage war on the other, everything would collapse. Society could not exist. It is the rich who create wealth and resources for the rest of us, and we should always be grateful. Without them we would have nothing. This is how it is, how it must be. There is no other way...*

This is the mantra of civilisation – fed to us every day of our lives. Fear and dominance. It's implicitly repeated everywhere and by everyone, and we all accept it. If you don't like this message, then you must end civilisation. To do anything else is to accept it and embrace it. Read, listen to the news, take in

all that you hear and see, everything that comes out of civilisation. In it, sometimes explicit, mostly implicit, you will find repeated over and over again all of the above. Always. Everywhere. There is no escaping it. It is so blindingly obvious that we just don't hear it anymore.

Yet slowly, but surely, more and more of us are beginning to hear the voice of civilisation. We are beginning to understand what has happened to us. We have been torn from our Garden of Eden, forced into slavery, and the Garden bulldozed. We hear the lies, the constant mantra. We see the vast era of history and life that has been erased. The stories that will never be told. The lives and cultures that were extinguished. The magnificent, beautiful wild, *our home*, our beautiful home, that has been obliterated and concreted over. We see, hear and feel the animals, the forests, the rivers and the life that once was. We see the war on indigenous peoples all over the globe. We see the war on life. We see the arrogance, the assumption of humanity as master, the assumption that human needs trump all others, that some human needs are greater than others, the arrogance that we are Gods, that we can do what we like because we are so ingenious and clever we can solve anything. We see the whole, terrible picture. We see civilisation for what it really is: **an evolutionary dead end. A suicidal war on all life. A pathological view of the world that will destroy us all. A system of enslavement of the many for the few.** That is what civilisation is. That is what cities are. That is what we have come to call progress. We all know it, but most of us refuse to hear it. It's just not what we want to hear. And it's not what we want to hear because civilisation has loaded us with a view of the world that ensures it's not what we want to hear. But hear it we must, for if we don't we are all doomed. It is our only hope.

## What is Civilisation?

For the purposes of this booklet, civilisation is taken to be that mode of human society that results in cities, large scale intensive agriculture, state power, insulation from nature and domestication.

Cities require vast resources to maintain, leading to those resources being stolen from elsewhere, and to ecological destruction. State power leads to a ruling class which seeks to constantly increase its power and affluence, fuelling growth, conquest, inequality and the need for ever more resources. Both require a domesticated population of obedient slaves (willing or otherwise) to create wealth.

Civilisation is said to have first begun in an area of land which is now referred to as Iran and Iraq about 10,000 years ago. How it started, or why, is unknown.

What we do know is that the history of civilisation since that time has been one of continual conquest, murder (of the gatherer hunter people that lived on the land required by civilisation, and anyone or anything else that got in the way), appropriation of resources, growth, slavery and massive ecological destruction.

The history of civilisation is commonly referred to as *progress*. This *progress* has led us to our current mode of social organisation.

It is important to stress that, within this booklet, civilisation is considered separate from mass society. It may be that forms of mass society exist that reject the mantra of civilisation and create an egalitarian, ecological world – indeed, we must all hope such a society exists

## **Anarcho-primitivism**

*For millions of years humans have lived as anarchists. That is, as autonomous individuals without the existence of coercive power, work, and institutions: without mediation. Anarchy is in our bones. It's the way we act; it's the way that millions of years of human evolution have shaped us. We are beings of the paleolith: gatherer-hunters, primitives, beings of this earth.*

*Kevin Tucker*

One of the areas where anarcho-primitivism breaks from anarchism is in the belief that there is and can never be anarchism under civilisation. Many forms of anarchy continue with the concept of civilisation, and of the properties underlying it, believing that reorganising civilisation along anarchic lines will solve our social and environmental problems.

For anarcho-primitivists, the principles of anarchy and civilisation seem completely incompatible. Who, after all, will maintain a city's sewer systems? Who has the right to decide that all life must be subservient to our cities? If we strive to dominate nature, can we really build a world where we do not strive to dominate each other?

## **Critiques of anarcho-primitivism**

Many people criticise anarcho-primitivism for having a rose tinted view of our gatherer-hunter past. They point out that there are many examples of gatherer-hunter societies that were violent, gender biased, ecologically destructive, etc. Whilst this may contain some truth, they miss the main point, which is that based on the available anthropological evidence, these are very rare exceptions. In addition, they fail to note the more obvious point that, whilst this may have been true of a very few gatherer-hunter societies, it has been spectacularly true for ALL civilisations, past or present.

The simple truth is that our hunter gatherer ancestors were the closest we have ever come to anarchist utopia, and if we are striving for an anarchic future, then on the basis of the available evidence it is more likely to

resemble the cultures and societies of our ancestors and present gatherer-hunter peoples, then it is the fatally flawed model of civilisation, which is at the opposite end of the anarchic spectrum.

Another critique of anarcho-primitivism is that returning to a hunter gatherer way of life would mean a massive cull in population. This is undoubtedly true, and is one reason why such a return is simply not possible, even were it a remotely realistic option.

However, this does not mean anarcho-primitivism ought to be dismissed. There is much to learn from our past about who and what we are, and about how to live sustainably and cooperatively.

Many people cling to the mantra of civilisation as they look to find new ways of organising society along more just lines. Anarcho-primitivist thinking leads us to conclude that whilst the mantra of civilisation corrupts our thinking no such future is possible. No anarchic civilisations have ever existed. The only anarchic cultures to have existed are those of our gatherer-hunter ancestors, and existing gatherer-hunter peoples.

This leads to the view that anarchy is an elimination of civilisation as we know it and the rebirth of a new mode of human existence, one that must incorporate anarcho-primitivist thinking yet that must also accept the present reality of mass society.

It is clearly not enough to suggest that we must all be gatherer-hunters. We must break out of our prison cages and find a new way.

## **Rewilding**

*When we learn to open ourselves to wildness and chaos, the organic anarchy of our beings will flow. Attacking civilisation is no easy feat, but when we listen, when we embrace our anti-state of nature, we will know exactly what to do.*



I am not advocating a return to our gatherer-hunter past, as some anarcho-primitivists might do. We simply don't have the skill or the knowledge or the wilderness. Though we have no doubt reclaimed a portion of that knowledge, the bulk of it is gone, probably forever. What I am advocating is the need to challenge the assumptions inherent in our culture, and also to press ahead to a new phase in our collective history. No-one should want to be civilised – the term is loaded with greed, destruction, arrogance – all of the very qualities it purports not to represent.

Instead, we need to rewild ourselves and our environment. Restore our relationship to the natural world, take back our place in the community of life, remake our living spaces to accommodate all life, recognise the rights of all creatures to the land, and share our world willingly with them. Defend them from civilised peoples who wish to destroy them.

There is no such thing as a sustainable city - those who suggest so pay lip service to claims for social equality and ecology. Where there are cities there is ecological destruction on a massive scale, there is also a huge underclass keeping the city fed and maintained, and vast tracts of land devoted to feeding it and it alone. There is widespread pollution, and there is an underlying assumption that humanity has the right to do what it wants with the world, and that all creatures are subservient. And while this remains the mantra of our mother culture, there will be no solution to the ecological or social crises. How we treat nature will always mirror how we treat each other.

This is an advocacy to rewild. A call to hear and recognise the voice of our mother culture, and to fight it.

Rewilding is a recognition of why civilisation is not the answer. It is recognising the message that is repeatedly whispered into our ears every day, non stop. It's the recognition of the premises of civilisation that is the first step.

Rewilding is recognising and honouring our ancestors. It is where we came from, they brought us here. Without them, we would never exist. They are in us, and they are part of us. Civilisation wants us to forget our ancestors for a reason. For in our ancestors lies our true spirit: anarchy.

Rewilding is about building a new world from the bottom up, starting at home. Like the transition movement, it seeks to engage everyone with a message: we have reached peak civilisation, and now we must begin to rewild.

Rewilding is not a call to physically destroy civilisation. Civilisation is founded on ideas, and ideas cannot be physically destroyed. Civilisation is something that each of us enact in our own lives and thoughts. We must know what is wrong before we can fix it. We must wake up our lost brothers and sisters, and bring them home.

But rewilding is not a call to inaction either. We must not be willing slaves.

Rewilding is a call to relearn how to live, based on cooperation with nature and each other. It is a call to experiment. To seek to form family groups, based on affinity, consensus, egalitarianism. To free ourselves from the civilised mindset. To learn to utilise the food that surrounds us, spend time in nature, relearn lost skills, invent new ones, utilise natural and unnatural resources, care for those around you, to incorporate the knowledge of our ancestors and the wisdom of those alive today, and to use this to imagine a new world. A world not governed by the mantra of civilisation. A world without coercion. A world without slavery. A world in harmony with nature. We must hope such a world is possible, and actively work towards it.

But rewilding on its own is not enough. Traditional anarchy, which challenges the existing power structures and capitalist domination that keep us all enslaved, is essential. Indeed, this is perhaps the most essential element of rewilding, since it is the existing global elite, power structures, capitalist industrialism and the mindless thirst for profit that are driving us most rapidly

towards increasing enslavement and ecological collapse. This, above all else, is the fundamental obstacle today to building any positive future.

Rewilding needs to be a call to anarchy, an anarchy that rejects the mantra of civilisation.

### **What could an anarchic future look like?**

The future is for us all to create, collectively, and answering such a question is impossibly difficult at the present moment, when all looks bleak. Not only are we facing global ecological collapse, we are also increasingly being led into an automated police state, an Orwellian 1984, at a time when our freedom is needed most. We are a long way from where we need to be, and aren't even heading in the right direction, making the present course of action simply one of resistance to the state and all forms of coercive power, and of working within our communities for positive solutions.

Yet to write this booklet and not answer such a question, albeit briefly, would represent a failure of imagination. As such, the best I can offer is a snapshot of what could represent a better future, a future in harmony with our anarchic nature and with the natural world, and one that could sustain the present population.

Such a future may incorporate forest gardens in place of large scale intensive agriculture. Forest gardens nurture life instead of destroying it, and produce more food per acre than traditional agriculture. It might include farming of livestock on unmanaged, bio-diverse wild pasture (as opposed to green deserts), as currently practised by some organic farmers.

Eco build, eco villages and living structures could provide housing. Others may choose to live in nature. Natural, renewable resources would be utilised sustainably. Production would be for need, not greed. Everyone has freedom of the land. (how many people would remain in cities if given freedom of the land? Cities are filled by forcing people off the land in the first place.) People utilise wild food and medicine extensively, and teach their children to. People exist in egalitarian communes, or small (or larger) communities, operating by

consensus and mutual cooperation. People enjoy rich and rewarding relations with the community of life that surrounds them, and with each other.

Such a future can only be achieved by valuing social and ecological integrity equally and far above the pursuit of profit. Such a future is possible. It is up to each of us to create it.

In the meantime, refuse to obey, actively resist, share & care, create, learn, love life, be wild and above all yearn for freedom.

Anonymous, 2010.



Back cover illustration by Wes Magyar.

